MAKE YOUR BUSINESS GROW. ADVERTISE IN DAWN INDUSTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in Karachi Lahore or Islamabad on UAN: 111-444-777

DAWN

RAISE YOUR COMPANY'S PROFILE. ADVERTISE IN DAWN COUNTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in Karachi Lahore or Islamabad on UAN: 111-444-777

PRIVATE water tankers, once considered a temporary expense, have now become an essential and recurring cost for Quetta residents.—Photo by Banaras Khan

Quetta thirsts for solutions as groundwater depletes

Officials warn that without urgent action, the city may face a severe water shortage within next five to ten years

By Saleem Shahid & Abdullah Zehri

SITUATIONER

FOR more than three decades, Muhammad Jahangir Khan has lived just off Spinny Road, a settled neighbourhood in Quetta with all the basic markers of an urban locality.

The area has gas and electricity connections, and most streets are paved, but for all the trappings of civilisation, his home has never had running water.

Like many of his neighbours, Jahangir plans his daily routine around the arrival of a private water tanker, an expense that was once considered temporary, but has long since become a recurring cost.

Jahangir says that people living on his street have repeatedly submitted applications to elected representatives for pipeline installation, but their complaints were ignored, and no action was taken.

Even in areas where water is available, its supply is highly irregular. In some localities, residents receive water only once a day for a few hours, while others get it once a week.

In September last year, Commissioner of Quetta Division Shahzaib Khan Kakar and Deputy Commissioner Captain (Retd) Mehrullah Badini had warned that the water shortage in the provincial capital was worsening with each passing day, urging joint action by the government and citizens. "We are going to announce a water emergency in Quetta," they had cautioned.

Chairing a meeting on the Quetta Water Security and Resources Action Plan on Monday, Mr Kakar acknowledged how dire the situation had become.

Quetta's water situation, the meeting was told, is at an alarming level, and if immediate measures are not taken, citizens may face an acute water shortage in the next five to ten years.

Agreeing on the need for strict and practical decisions to prevent further groundwater depletion, the meeting agreed to formulate a comprehensive emergency action plan, explore new water storage options, install water treatment plants, and develop policies to provide alternative water sources to car washes and other commercial units.

Groundwater depletion

There are no magical solutions that can fix this systemic issue overnight, because behind this thirst lurks a deeper structural crisis, rooted in geography, climate and policy failure.

Despite covering nearly 44 per cent of Pakistan's landmass, Balochistan receives less than 200mm of annual rainfall, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department.

In Quetta, groundwater levels are falling by two to five metres annually, driven by unchecked extraction, including more than 30,000 illegal tube wells, per the Balochistan Agriculture Department.

Moreover, a study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) shows that the water table has dropped from about 50 metres in 2,000 to over 150 metres by 2023, posing a serious threat to agriculture and livelihoods.

The unregulated use of tube wells and excessive pumping has rapidly depleted groundwater reserves, with extraction far exceeding the rate of natural recharge.

Dr Munir Ahmed Babar of the US-Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Water (USPCAS-W) at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro, told *Dawn* that Quetta's continued reliance on tube wells was fundamentally unsustainable.

"Quetta depends almost completely on groundwater, and that groundwater is going down by around one to 1.5 meters every year," he said. "This means that more water is being pumped out than nature can refill, while continuing to install tube wells — even solar-powered ones — is not sustainable."

"Sustainability is only possible if new tube wells are restricted or banned, illegal wells sealed, groundwater pumping is measured and priced, recharge dams are built, and rainwater harvesting is introduced.

"Without regulation and recharge, Quetta is moving towards water exhaustion," he said.

Wasa Managing Director Mujeebur Rehman Kakar said the authority supplies water to just 51 per cent of Quetta's population, around 1.3 million people.

"We have 544 tube wells, of which 387 are functional," he told *Dawn*, adding that around 1,000 may be unauthorised.

He cited arid climate, low rainfall, poor geology, droughts, rapid urbanisation and weak monitoring as major contributors to the crisis.

Uneven relief across the city

While some areas have seen limited intervention, relief remains uneven and fragile. Shahryar Kasi, a resident of Shaldara on Kasi Road, said water shortages in the area were once severe. "Wasa used to supply water after a week or 10 days, and even that would stop within minutes," he said.

He added that during the tenure of the previous government, a tube well was installed on Kasi Road, easing shortages in the surrounding areas. "Now we get water once a day, which has provided some relief," he added.

The situation, however, has not improved uniformly throughout the city, with many areas receiving water only once a week.

Khair Muhammad Dehwar, a resident of Kalat Street in the Jail Road area, said the water situation deteriorated after Balochistan faced a prolonged drought from 1998 to 2006.

"Some tube wells installed by the government were damaged, but they never got repaired," he said, adding that Wasa later refused to take over certain wells, citing insufficient groundwater.

In several neighbourhoods, even state-led interventions have failed to deliver equitable access. Umair Parkani, a resident of Killi Bangulzai in Quetta Saryab district, said his neighbourhood has relied on private tankers for years despite elected representatives from his area making repeated promises.

Others have to keep paying the water bill, despite seldom getting any.

Trump links Greenland dispute to 'Nobel denial'

• Tells Norway PM snub ended his obligation to think 'purely of peace' • EU leaders eye retaliatory tariffs as German, Norwegian leaders rush to Davos

PARIS: US President Donald Trump linked his drive to take control of Greenland to his failure to win the Nobel Peace Prize, saying he no longer thought "purely of Peace" as the row over the island on Monday threatened to reignite a trade war with Europe.

Trump has ramped up pressure to wrest sovereignty over Greenland from fellow Nato member Denmark, threatening punitive tariffs on countries that oppose the move. The diplomatic threatens to upend the Nato alliance that has underpinned Western security for decades.

The ultimatum has plunged trade relations between the US and the European Union into renewed turmoil just months after the two sides painstakingly reached a deal to resolve previous tariff disputes.

In a message to Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere seen by *Reuters*, Trump linked his geopolitical strategy to his grievance with the Nobel Committee, who awarded the 2025 Peace Prize to Venezuelan leader Maria Corina Machado instead of him.

"Considering your Country decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped 8 Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace, although it will always be predominant, but can now think about what is good and proper for the United States of America," Trump wrote.

The committee's choice visibly annoyed Trump. In a recent White House meeting, Machado offered him her medal, but the Nobel Committee clarified it can't be transferred, shared, or revoked.

In his correspondence with Stoere, Trump repeated his accusation that Denmark is incapable of protecting Greenland from Russian or Chinese encroachment.

Questioning why Denmark maintains a "right of ownership", he wrote, "The World is not secure unless we have Complete and Total Control of Greenland."

Trump vowed on Saturday to implement a wave of increasing tariffs starting Feb.1.

The tariffs target EU countries Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, and allies Britain and Norway. They will remain until the US can purchase the island with about 57,000 residents.

In a Facebook post, Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen rejected the pressure campaign, asserting that the territory must be allowed to decide its own fate.

The dispute has forced an immediate reshuffling of high-level diplomatic schedules. Stoere amended his plans to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, specifically to address the crisis.

The Norwegian leader will be in Davos on Wednesday and Thursday, overlapping with Trump, who is expected to deliver a keynote address on Wednesday in his first appearance at the gathering of global elites in six years.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated he would also attempt to meet with Trump on Wednesday to prevent further economic deterioration.

"But if we are confronted with tariffs that we consider unreasonable, then we are capable of responding," Merz warned.

EU leaders will meet for an emergency summit in Brussels on Thursday to discuss options. They are considering retaliatory tariffs on 93 billion euros ($108 billion) of US imports, which could start on Feb 6 after a six-month suspension.

Another option under consideration is the "Anti-Coercion Instrument" (ACI). The tool, which has never been used, would allow the bloc to limit US access to public tenders, investments, or banking activity.

It could also restrict trade in services, a sector where the US currently enjoys a surplus with the bloc. While the EU maintains it is engaging "at all levels" with Washington, officials confirmed that the use of the ACI is not off the table.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer called for calm discussions between allies, adding that he did not believe Trump was seriously considering military action to seize Greenland.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin declined to comment on the specific US designs on the island, though it noted Trump would "go down in ... world history" if he managed to take control of the territory.

The political volatility has rattled financial markets. European shares dropped on Monday, and the dollar fell as investors sought safety in other currencies.—Agencies

Chinese national among seven killed in Kabul restaurant bombing

KABUL: An explosion ripped through a Chinese-run restaurant located in a heavily fortified area of Kabul on Monday, killing a Chinese national and six Afghans while injuring several others including a child, officials said.

The blast occurred at around 3:30pm at the Chinese Noodle restaurant in the Shahr-e-Naw neighbourhood, a commercial district known for its flower sellers that houses office buildings and embassies.

Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran said the explosion struck near the restaurant's kitchen.

"A Chinese Muslim, Ayub, and six Afghans were killed, and several others were wounded," Mr Zadran said.

Italian humanitarian NGO EMERGENCY said its nearby hospital received 20 patients following the blast.

"Among the wounded are four women and a child," Dejan Panic, the NGO's country director, said in a statement. "Unfortunately, seven people were already dead on arrival."

Thirteen people were admitted to the surgical department, the NGO said.

Mr Zadran identified the establishment as a business jointly run by a Chinese Muslim named Abdul Majid, his wife and an Afghan partner, Abdul Jabbar Mahmood. He said the restaurant mainly served the Chinese Muslim community.

Videos shared on social media showed smoke spewing from a large hole torn into the front of the building and debris scattered on the street. Windows in the building opposite were smashed.

A flower shop owner, who requested anonymity for security reasons, told *AFP* the explosion occurred at the other end of the street from his business. He described hearing the "strong sound" of a blast in the crowded area.

"It was an emergency situation. Everybody feared for his own life," he said. "I could see at least five wounded."

Police said the cause of the explosion is under investigation. Within hours of the incident, the street was reopened to traffic, with cars streaming past the restaurant's covered entrance.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. However, the local arm of the Islamic State group has claimed previous bombings in the area, including a deadly attack the following year on a Kabul hotel popular with Chinese guests. —Agencies

US invites Russia, Israel, Poland to Gaza 'Board of Peace'

• Kazakh, Uzbek leaders ready to join; Moscow weighs 'nuances' • Starmer pledges UK support for Gaza reconstruction efforts • Israeli minister issues 'us or them' ultimatum to Netanyahu

MOSCOW: The White House on Monday extended invitations to leaders from Russia, Poland and Israel to join a so-called "Board of Peace" which aims to address global conflicts and manage governance and reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

While others weigh participation, Central Asian leaders moved quickly to accept. The press secretaries of Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev confirmed their leaders' readiness to join the board.

Both leaders have been courted by Trump, who invited them to the G20 summit in Miami.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said on Monday that Russian President Vladimir Putin received an invitation to join the board, which would be chaired by Trump.

"President Putin also received an invitation to join this Board of Peace," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists. He said Russia was seeking to "clarify all the nuances" of the offer with Washington but did not specify if Putin was inclined to join.

Last October, Putin praised Trump's efforts, noting that "he's really doing a lot to resolve these complex crises".

Additionally, Israel has received an invitation, though it is unclear whether it has been accepted. Furthermore, Polish president's foreign policy adviser said that President Karol Nawrocki of Poland has also been extended an invitation.

As Washington canvasses for participants, Britain signalled its willingness to play a role. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Monday that the UK was in discussions with allies on the terms of the initiative.

Speaking at a press conference, Starmer indicated Britain is ready to assist in the second phase of the ceasefire in Gaza, particularly regarding the US-led board.

'Us or them'

However, the initiative faces significant internal headwinds within Israel. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich on Monday urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to shut down the US-led Civil Military Coordination Centre (CMCC) established last October to support the peace plan.

"The time has come to dismantle the headquarters in Kiryat Gat," Smotrich said in remarks distributed by his office, referring to the facility where international personnel work on post-war planning.

Smotrich, a far-right cabinet member, argued that Britain, Egypt and other nations "hostile to Israel" should be removed from the coordination centre.

"Mr Prime Minister, it's either us or them," Smotrich said. "Either full Israeli control, the destruction of Hamas, and the continued long-term suppression of terrorism ... or permanent Israeli settlement."

Smotrich added that Hamas should be given a short ultimatum to disarm and go into exile, followed by an assault with "full force" if refused.

Netanyahu's office has not responded to Smotrich's remarks but has previously criticised the composition of the Gaza Executive Board — a body falling under the Board of Peace authority — citing objections to the inclusion of Turkey and Qatar.

"The head of state sent a letter to the president of the United States expressing sincere gratitude and confirming his agreement to join this new association," Tokayev's spokesman, Ruslan Zheldibay, said.

Trump originally proposed the Board of Peace as part of a 20-point plan to end the war in Gaza. The White House recently announced the plan is moving to its second phase, focusing on demilitarisation and reconstruction, following a ceasefire in October that saw the release of remaining hostages.

According to a draft charter seen by *Reuters*, the board is described as an international organisation seeking to secure enduring peace in areas threatened by conflict. Trump has invited 60 countries to join, with permanent membership available to nations that contribute $1 billion.—Agencies

Iran says internet to return 'gradually' after 11-day blackout

• Davos disinvites FM Araghchi over 'tragic' crackdown • UN condemns use of executions as 'a tool of state intimidation'

TEHRAN: Internet access in Iran will "gradually" return to normal this week, a senior official said on Monday, as the government faces international fallout from an 11-day communications blackout imposed during deadly anti-government protests.

The announcement came the same day organisers of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, confirmed the Iranian foreign minister would not attend the summit because it would not be "right" following the recent crackdown.

Simultaneously, the United Nations issued a report condemning Tehran for using executions as a "tool of state intimidation".

"The internet will gradually return to normal operations this week," Hossein Afshin, Iran's vice president for science, technology and the knowledge economy, said on Monday on state television.

The government imposed a nationwide communications blackout earlier this month amid huge demonstrations triggered by anger over economic hardship.

Limited internet access briefly returned on Sunday for some foreign websites such as Google, but opening links from search results remained impossible as of Monday.

The shutdown began on Jan 8 Norway-based Iran Human Rights said it has verified the deaths of 3,428 protesters killed by security forces, confirming cases through sources within the Islamic Republic's health and medical system, witnesses and independent sources.

The NGO warned the true toll is likely far higher. The media cannot independently confirm the figure, and Iranian officials have not provided an exact death toll.

'Not right'

Iran's foreign minister will not be attending the Davos summit in Switzerland this week, the organisers said, stressing it would not be "right" after the recent deadly crackdown on protesters in Iran.

Abbas Araghchi had been scheduled to speak on Tuesday during the annual gathering of the global elite at the upscale Swiss ski resort town.

But activists have been calling on the World Economic Forum organisers to disinvite him amid what rights groups have called a "massacre" in his country. "The Iranian Foreign Minister will not be attending Davos," the World Economic Forum said on X.

THE state tax building in Tehran, which was set on fire during the recent protests.—Reuters

"Although he was invited last fall, the tragic loss of lives of civilians in Iran over the past few weeks means that it is not right for the Iranian government to be represented at Davos this year," it added.

'Intimidation tool'

Iran appears to be using executions "as a tool of state intimidation", the United Nations said on Monday, as it denounced a jump in capital punishment globally in 2025.

The Islamic republic reportedly executed 1,500 people last year, UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

"The scale and pace of executions suggest a systematic use of capital punishment as a tool of state intimidation, with disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities and migrants," he warned.

The spike in executions in Iran — which according to rights groups is the world's most prolific executioner after China — had contributed to "an alarming increase" in the use of capital punishment worldwide last year, Turk said.

While the overall global trend continues to move towards universal abolition of the death penalty, Iran and a handful of other states such as Saudi Arabia and the United States saw executions surge.

"Many of those executions were "for offences not meeting the 'most serious crimes' threshold required under international law," Turk said, also criticising "the continued execution of people convicted of crimes committed as children, as well as persistent secrecy around executions".—AFP

Printed at Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Khalil Mohsin and published for Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Shahjahan at Haroon House, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road, Karachi. EDITOR: ZAFFAR ABBAS